

TALKING POINTS ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE REPORT SESSION

Introduction

- It is a great pleasure to introduce our two Environment Committee chairs: EPA Administrator Carol Browner and Minister of Environment and Natural Resources Viktor Danilov-Danilyan [dah-NEE-loff dah-neel-YAHN].
- At our last meeting in Washington, we signed a bilateral framework agreement on cooperation in protecting the environment and natural resources.
- On this occasion, we are to conclude an agreement that is in some ways even more remarkable: an agreement on cooperation in Prevention of Pollution in the Arctic.
- This agreement affords our two countries a truly historic opportunity: to turn a region of the world that was once the vortex of Cold War confrontation into a zone of cooperation and shared commitment for generations to come.
- Another document proposed for our signature today is a Joint Statement on the Sustainable Management of Russia's Natural Resources. The goal of this initiative is to ensure that the growing volume of trade and investment between our two countries is as ecologically sound as it is commercially profitable.
- There are many other issues that are being addressed under the auspices of our Environment Committee; as you know Mr. Prime Minister, many of these issues are of keen personal interest to me. But in the interests of time, let me yield the floor to our two Committee Chairs.
- *[Prime Minister Chernomyrdin responds or assents; Minister Danilov will lead off.]*

Comments on Conclusion of the Committee Report/Points for Discussion

Arctic Pollution Agreement

- I wish to extend special thanks to both Co-Chairs for the effort they and their staffs exerted in securing final approval for the text of the Arctic Pollution Agreement. I should also thank our colleagues in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Department of State for their support in making this agreement possible.

Murmansk Radioactive Waste Initiative

- It was gratifying to see that our cooperation on the issue of alternatives to ocean dumping of low-level radioactive wastewater was included in the topics discussed during the September summit meeting of our two Presidents.
- Cooperation on this problem is fully consistent with the goals of the new bilateral Arctic Pollution Agreement, and is supportive of the aims of important multilateral regimes, such as the London Convention and the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy, in which both our countries participate.
- I believe that the willingness of our American experts to visit Murmansk in the dead of winter is testimony to our seriousness of purpose in this project!

Komi Oil Spill [contingent]

- I cannot help but note the connection between the Arctic Pollution Agreement that we are to sign at this Commission meeting and the situation that has developed in the Komi Republic with regard to the oil spill.
- I understand that the Russian Government has received many offers of assistance in dealing with this problem, which is complex in many respects. I am pleased to see that U.S. personnel are participating on the U.N.-sponsored assessment team recently [currently] in Komi. Let me assure you, Mr. Prime Minister, that we are prepared to work with the American petroleum industry and the Russian government in offering comprehensive technical advice to help deal with this problem and perhaps finding a commercial solution to prevent its recurrence.
- Our common goal should be to prevent future such occurrences, in a spirit of responsible stewardship of the Arctic and its vast natural resources.

Natural Resource Use and Biodiversity Conservation

- I am most pleased to hear of the progress being made under the three USAID-funded projects that address biodiversity conservation.
- The Lake Baikal project for Sustainable Land Use Planning and Watershed Protection has already demonstrated in a very tangible way that sustainable use and concern for ecosystem integrity are compatible with economic growth.

- It is particularly encouraging that this principle will be expanded in the Natural Resource Environmental Management Program in the Russian Far East. I look forward to hearing about progress on this project at the next Commission session.
- Against the backdrop of this important project, I think it is wholly fitting that you and I, Mr. Prime Minister, issue the Joint Statements prepared by our staffs on Sustainable Management of Russian Natural Resources and on Conservation of Biodiversity.
- Let me also congratulate Russia on its designation as a member of the Standing Committee at the Conference of Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Fauna and Flora (CITES), held last month in Florida.

Russian Participation in the Global Environmental Agenda

- Let me offer my sincere congratulations to you, Mr. Prime Minister, for your government's efforts in gaining Parliamentary ratification in October of the Framework Convention on Climate Change.
- It is most gratifying to see that, despite your many economic difficulties, you grasp the importance of this pressing global issue. The Clinton Administration is delighted to welcome Russia as a Party to the Convention.
- We should likewise welcome further bilateral consultations on implementation of the Climate Convention.

Health-Based Environmental Risk Assessment

- As you know, our new Health Committee is just beginning to formulate its agenda. I would propose that our Environment and Health Committees consult actively in the months ahead and be prepared to report by the next Commission meeting on prospects for bilateral cooperation on the human health effects of pollution.
- We on the U.S. side would especially welcome the opportunity to work with Russian environmental and health authorities on the introduction of an integrated health-based risk assessment methodology, which Russian national and regional authorities could use in prioritizing the most urgent environmental remediation tasks.
- Such an effort could be based on the technical assistance projects in Nizhnii Tagil [NEE-zhnee tah-GEEL] and Novokuznetsk [no-vo-kooz-NETSK], which provide promising models of risk-based environmental management at the local level.

"Mil-Mil" Environmental Consultations

- I am particularly pleased by the discussions that have begun between the environmental units of our respective defense organizations, the office of the U.S. Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Environmental Security and the Directorate for Ecological Safety of the Russian Ministry of Defense. It seems to me that both sides have much to learn from each other.
- This trend is all the more promising in that it has also involved environment and natural resources agencies on each side working with their respective militaries. Earlier this year, 24 Russian defense environmental experts visited the U.S. for one month to study U.S. management of natural resources on military lands.
- Mr. Prime Minister, I believe this is exactly the kind of innovative partnership that our Commission should encourage.

Guidance for the Future

- In conclusion, let me applaud again the efforts of both sides to conclude the Arctic Pollution Agreement. I hope that, by the next Commission meeting, we will have examples of concrete implementation--be it in Murmansk, the Komi Republic, or the Beringia Heritage International Park.
- We look forward to hearing about project implementation within the technical assistance program. In particular, we would appreciate policy recommendations on promoting conservation in the Russian Far East: how to increase forest utilization, create jobs, increase revenues from the forest sector, and reduce environmental damage.
- At the next Commission meeting, I hope the Environment Committee will also be able to discuss how liability affects the privatization process and offer initial ideas on how to alleviate any barriers to privatization and foreign investment.
- I am also interested in prospects for increased cooperation in the realm of environmental education. There is much room for joint effort here beyond that envisioned in the GLOBE Program. This too could be a special topic for consideration at our next Commission meeting.

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